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ABSTRACT

This handbook presents an overview of the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment and a description of the Writing Assessment. Districts are encouraged to use the procedures and methods described to create prompts and score writing samples as part of their district-level assessment program. After an introduction and overview of the Pennsylvania State Assessment System and of writing assessment, sections of the paper address: elements of the writing assessment (writing strategies and the writing sample); evaluating writing; and reporting results. Appendixes present the holistic scoring guide, sample anchor prompts and student essays, a list of Advisory Committee members, and information on testing accommodations to engourage participation by students with disabilities. (RS)

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ED 460 372

The Pennsylvania
System of School Assessment

Writing Assessment Handbook

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Pennsylvania Department of Education
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E. HOTTINGER

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1998-1999

CS 216 722

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INTRODUCTION

The *Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA)* utilizes a school-based assessment system that provides comparative data to schools and districts for use in planning and informing the public. In the 1994–95 school year, student names were added to the assessments so that student scores in math and reading could be reported to parents, teachers, principals and guidance counselors. Pending regulation would provide for individual student scores to be reported for all three assessments as the PSSA moves toward a system for increased student accountability.

This publication presents an overview of the state assessment system and a description of the Writing Assessment. ***The Pennsylvania Framework for Reading, Writing and Talking Across the Curriculum, PCRP II*** can assist classroom teachers in instructional methods and techniques that support and enhance the writing process underlying the assessment. Assessment handbooks also are available for mathematics and reading. One copy of each of these documents can be obtained by sending a mailing label to:

Pennsylvania Department of Education
Division of Evaluation and Reports
333 Market Street, 8th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126–0333.

Districts are encouraged to use the procedures and methods described herein to create prompts and score writing samples as part of their district-level assessment program. District-level instructional and assessment programs, however, should include other types of writing assignments and other methods of assessment, such as annotated holistic scoring, analytic scoring, primary trait scoring and portfolios.

OVERVIEW OF THE PENNSYLVANIA SYSTEM OF SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

The purposes of the **Pennsylvania System of School Assessment** are to:

- determine the achievement levels of Pennsylvania students in the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics;
- provide results to school districts for consideration in the development of strategic plans;
- provide information to state policy makers about student achievement and how schools in the commonwealth are performing;
- focus the educational direction of educators in the field via sharing assessment results and providing widespread in-service on the assessment techniques used in PSSA; and
- provide information to the general public about student and school achievement.

The PSSA is continually being evaluated and improved based on feedback from students, parents and schools. All state assessments are conducted in English and currently concentrate on the following academic areas:

- Communications:
  - Reading at grades 5, 8 and 11
  - Writing at grades 6 and 9
    - Pending regulation includes grade 11 for writing
- Mathematics at grades 5, 8 and 11

All school districts participate in the reading and mathematics assessment each year. Participation in the writing assessment coincides with a district's six-year strategic planning cycle. Assessment occurs before planning begins, after three years, and at the end of the strategic planning cycle. Additional districts may participate off-cycle on a voluntary basis. Pending regulation provides for all districts to participate in the writing assessment every year.

The reading and mathematics assessments use a combination of census testing and matrix sampling procedures. Census testing requires all students to complete the same set of multiple-choice items and performance tasks. Matrix sampling is accomplished by dividing a large set of items, both multiple-choice and performance tasks, into several different test forms with an equal number of items on all forms. Matrix sampling helps to limit the time required for the assessment, provides for consistent administration procedures and reflects broad curriculum content. As the PSSA moves toward a system for increased student accountability, less matrix sampling will be used.

As part of each test form in reading and mathematics, students are asked to respond to multiple choice items. They also are asked to respond **in writing** to questions about reading passages and to explain in **writing** how they arrived at answers to mathematics problems. These *performance assessments* are included so students can explain what they are thinking and doing. The writing assessment requires students to respond to one of nine different prompts or topics in one of three modes of writing—narrative/imaginative, persuasive or informational.

The information obtained by school districts from the PSSA is one lens on students' achievement that may be included in student portfolios and utilized when writing curriculum or planning academic programs. The performance assessment tasks are intended to inform teaching and serve as a model for intermediate unit and school district assessment development.

Advisory committees of Pennsylvania educators chose the concepts on which the reading, mathematics and writing assessments are based. These groups include teachers from all levels, supervisors, curriculum directors and college specialists. They also wrote many of the test questions, tasks and writing prompts or chose them from items written especially for Pennsylvania. See Appendix C for a list of members of the Writing Assessment Advisory Committee.

OVERVIEW: WRITING ASSESSMENT

In recognition of the vital role that writing plays in our lives, the development of students' ability to write effectively for a variety of purposes and audiences has become one of the desired goals for communications instruction in schools.

In 1989, as part of a continuing review of the conceptual bases for statewide testing, the Writing Assessment Advisory Committee (WAAC) was formed to design a writing test that would measure students' ability to write for different purposes. To do this, they examined writing research, investigated various types of writing assessments being used by several other states and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and studied the implications of the Pennsylvania Department of Education's framework for integrating communication skills across the curriculum. During this review, it became apparent that, because of the complexity of the writing process, an adequate conception of writing must be established. Since a single, simple definition of writing may fail to capture this complexity, the Writing Assessment Advisory Committee recommends the following operational definition of writing presented by the National Council of Teachers of English and supported by the ***Pennsylvania Framework.***

> Writing is the process of selecting, combining, arranging and developing ideas in effective sentences, paragraphs, and, often longer units of discourse. The process requires the writer to cope with a number of variables: ***method of development*** (narrating, explaining, describing, reporting and persuading); ***tone*** (from personal to quite formal); ***form*** (from a limerick to a formal letter to a long research report); ***purpose*** (from discovering and expressing personal feelings and values to conducting the impersonal "business" of everyday life); and ***possible audiences*** (oneself, classmates, a teacher, "the world"). Learning to write and to write increasingly well involves developing increasing skill and sensitivity in selecting from and combining these variables to shape particular messages. It also involves learning to conform to conventions of the printed language, appropriate to the age of the writer and to the form, purpose and tone of the message. Beyond the pragmatic purpose of shaping messages to others, writing can be a means of self-discovery, of finding out what we believe, know, and cannot find words or circumstances to say to others. Writing can be a deeply personal act of shaping our perception of the world and our relationships to people and things in that world. Thus, writing serves both public and personal needs of students, and it warrants the full, generous and continuing effort of all teachers.[1]

In keeping with the active nature of performance assessment, students knowing and doing, this writing assessment is performance-based rather than an objective measure of isolated skills. As Breland and Jones point out, direct assessment of writing samples gets at certain kinds of skills that multiple-choice tests, no matter how constructed, simply cannot measure, namely: "(1) the ability to organize ideas in logical and coherent expository prose; (2) the ability to structure thought in a recognizable rhetorical pattern, i.e., the simple beginning, middle, and end; (3) the ability to demonstrate fluency and ease in the invention of appropriate syntactical patterns; and (4) the ability to identify and employ an appropriate tone and style to match a presumed audience."

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[1] Breland, Hunter M. and Robert J. Jones, (1982). ***Perceptions of Writing Skill.*** (ETS RR NO. 8247). New York: College Board Publications.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education believes this direct or performance assessment of writing will enhance instructional efforts by encouraging teachers to design instruction around thoughtful, effective and meaningful writing tasks.

The writing assessment provides a broad measure of students' abilities to write for a variety of purposes, specifically to narrate, inform and persuade in all subject areas.

The writing assessment is to serve as a model in both form and process. This model includes administration, product, evaluation and reporting. Educators are recruited by the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Division of Evaluation and Reports to participate in the annual training and scoring of writing samples obtained from field tests (see p. 10). Those educators gain a better understanding of the multiple aspects and interdependence of curriculum, instruction and assessment. They become resource persons for their districts, i.e., they may train their colleagues to score and/or assist in the development of district writing assessment systems.

Districts are encouraged to use the procedures and methods described to conduct writing sample assessments as part of their own writing and assessment programs. District programs, however, should include other types of writing assignments and other methods of assessment, such as annotated holistic scoring, analytic scoring, primary trait scoring and process portfolios.

Modes of Discourse

Even before the state included these types of writing in its Academic Standards, the WAAC identified three "modes" or types of writing to be among the most important in school and in life, and to be most appropriate for the state assessment.

Narrative/Imaginative Writing

Narrative/imaginative writing creates, manipulates and interprets reality. It requires writers to closely observe, explore and reflect upon a wide range of experiences. It encourages creativity and speculation and offers writers an opportunity to understand the emotions and actions of themselves and others. At all grade levels, the functions of this mode of writing are to *narrate, reminisce or imagine.*

Informational Writing

Informational writing is used to share knowledge and convey messages, instructions or ideas by making connections between the familiar and unfamiliar. It is assessed because it is used as a common writing strategy in academic, personal and job related areas; as a tool that spans a range of thinking skills from recall to analysis and evaluation; and as a means of presenting information in prose. This type of writing has many functions: *to present information through reporting, explaining, directing, summarizing and defining; to organize and analyze information through explaining, comparing, contrasting and relaying cause/effect; or to evaluate information through judging, ranking or deciding.*

Persuasive Writing

Persuasive writing moves the reader to take an action or to form or change an opinion. This type of writing is assessed for three reasons: 1) it requires thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation; 2) it requires writers to choose from a variety of situations and to take a stand; and 3) it is a skill frequently used in school and the workplace. Persuasive writing has several functions: *to state and support a position, opinion or issue; or to defend, to refute or to argue.*

Purposes of the Writing Assessment

The writing sample assessment provides information to participating schools and school districts about the current status of students' writing and a process that can be used to begin monitoring writing skill development over time. This assessment was designed to influence instruction rather than to merely reflect it. The purposes of the assessment are to:

- monitor progress toward communication and writing achievement in Pennsylvania schools;
- measure performance in writing within a school and demonstrate "growth" within a district;
- provide a rough measure to evaluate the quality of writing within a school district;
- provide staff development opportunities in holistic scoring of writing;
- encourage school districts to develop a systematic program for improving the quality of writing;
- encourage more and different types of writing in Pennsylvania classrooms;
- provide information to help teachers strengthen their writing programs;
- provide information that will reinforce the value of writing;
- stimulate writing across the curriculum; and
- encourage districts to provide staff development in writing instruction and assessment.

The state writing assessment from 1990 to the present was not intended to make decisions about individual students. The state assessment provides comparative data about the school's writing program, and it serves as a validity check of the school's local assessment of writing. Pending regulation will increase student accountability and will therefore provide individual student results. This shift in accountability will necessitate a change in the design of the writing assessment when the pending regulation becomes law.

ELEMENTS OF THE ASSESSMENT: STRATEGIES IN WRITING

The writing process consists of various strategies students use before, during and after writing. Effective use of these strategies is evidenced by good writers. Not all of the strategies need to be used each time one writes; rather, one needs to be able to select and apply those strategies that best suit the writing task and situation. Students must be taught these strategies and given regular and ample opportunities to practice them.

The first items students encounter on the writing assessment relate to specific strategies used in the writing process. They are asked to respond to the following:

I have been taught:

- pre-writing skills (brainstorming, listing, planning, etc.).
- about different types of writing.
- how to revise and edit my writing.
- how to conference with my teacher.
- how to conference with my peers (classmates).
- how to use a computer or word processor for writing.

The response choices are:

- Yes
- No

Students are then asked to respond to the following statements dealing with opportunities to practice writing strategies:

- I plan, brainstorm, list, or read to gather ideas before I write.
- I write (stories, papers, etc.) in school.
- I have the opportunity to share my writing with my classmates (for example, peer conferencing, reading aloud, etc.).
- I have the opportunity to discuss my writing with my teacher.
- I revise and edit my writing.
- I write (papers) for classes other than for English class.
- I choose my own topics to write about.
- I use a computer or word processor for my writing.
- I share my writing with an audience other than my classmates (for example, newspaper or bulletin board).
- I hear teachers read to the class.
- I see my teachers using the writing process when they write.
- I hear teachers share their writing with the class.

The response choices are:

- Every day
- Every week
- Every month
- Every grading period
- Never

ELEMENTS OF THE ASSESSMENT: THE WRITING SAMPLE

ADMINISTRATION

Guidelines for the administration of the state assessment are sent to district assessment coordinators prior to the assessment, and test administrators also receive administration directions in time to preview them. Previously and in the 1999 assessment, students randomly receive one of the nine prompts on which to write. Two 40-minute sessions over two consecutive days are set aside for completing the assignment. During that time, students are encouraged to use learned processes in order to develop and produce their "final copy" (second draft), which is transcribed onto the two pages of the assessment folder by the end of the second 40-minute session. Results of a generalizability study in 1998–99 to determine a design for a writing assessment capable of providing a valid individual score may change the administration. Students are permitted to use a dictionary, thesaurus and electronic spell checker. Although elements of the writing process are incorporated into this assessment, it is a large-scale, **on demand** performance assessment, and they are not permitted to get assistance from teachers or peers.

THE WRITING ASSIGNMENT

One of the most critical tasks in the design of the writing assessment is the development of the writing prompts. A **prompt** is a statement or group of statements about a specific topic, constructed to motivate students' thoughts and elicit their best writing on the topic. Prompts that specify the purpose and audience have been developed to elicit the form of writing expected.

The prompts have a common set of directions that can be read by the test administrator as the students read along silently. Following each prompt is a set of five "reminder" statements. Each statement refers directly to one of the five *characteristics of effective writing*. These statements are designed to assist students by making expectations known.

SAMPLE PROMPTS

The following directions precede each prompt:

Directions

You will have two sessions to plan your paper, prepare a draft, revise and write your final copy on the topic given below.

During Session 1:

- think about what you want to say,
- make notes, and
- write a draft of your paper on the composition paper your teacher has provided.

During Session 2:

- reread the prompt,
- read your draft,
- make any changes in your draft you feel are necessary, and
- when you are satisfied with what you have written, copy it onto the **FINAL COPY** pages of the assessment folder.

READ THE ENTIRE PROMPT CAREFULLY.

SAMPLE NARRATIVE/IMAGINATIVE PROMPT

PROMPT 1

We all have memories connected to our experiences. Think about an experience you feel you'll always remember. Try to picture the time, the place, and the people involved. Try to remember everything you can about this experience.

Write about the experience you remember. Be sure to include enough details so that your reader can share your experience. Show why this memory stands out for you.

As you write and rewrite your paper, remember to:

- describe what happened.
- give details that are specific and relevant to this experience.
- present your ideas clearly and logically.
- use words and well-constructed sentences effectively.
- correct any errors in spelling, punctuation and capitalization.

Note how this prompt is designed to motivate the writer to narrate, reminisce and/or imagine.

SAMPLE INFORMATIONAL PROMPT

PROMPT 2

Think about discoveries or inventions that have affected our lives. Select one.

Write to inform someone about this discovery or invention. Tell whether it has been good or bad for society.

As you write and rewrite your paper, remember to:

- give enough information so that the reader will know what the discovery or invention is and why you chose it.
- give details that are specific and relevant to the discovery or invention.
- present your ideas clearly and logically.
- use words and well-constructed sentences effectively.
- correct any errors in spelling, punctuation and capitalization.

Note how this prompt is designed to motivate the writer to present, organize and analyze and evaluate information.

SAMPLE PERSUASIVE PROMPT

PROMPT 3

A new principal is contacting all students about changing or adding to the school rules. Think of a rule you would like to change or add.

Write to persuade the principal to use your suggestion.

As you write and rewrite your paper, remember to:

- state what rule you wish to change or add.
- include enough convincing details so the principal will want to use your suggestion.
- present your ideas clearly and logically.
- use words and well-constructed sentences effectively.
- correct any errors in spelling, punctuation and capitalization.

Note how this prompt is designed to motivate the writer to state and support a position, opinion or issue.

After each prompt the following directions appear:

When you have finished, close your assessment folder and sit quietly.

Before prompts are included on an assessment, they are field tested two years previous to ensure that they are fair to all students. In 1998 prompts will be field tested to determine possible inclusion on the year 2000 assessment. These field tests are scored by Pennsylvania educators. All educators are invited to apply to attend this Scoring Session. The invitation and application form are sent via PennLink in January for the April/May Scoring Session (see p. 10–11).

EVALUATING WRITING

The following information is presented as current and past practices. Results from the generalizability study conducted in school year 1998–99 may change much of the information on pages 10–13.

The Scoring Guide

The current Pennsylvania Scoring Guide has two components, the six-point scoring rubric and the five characteristics of effective writing. The interplay of these characteristics and the scoring criteria is graphically represented in Appendix A, **The Pennsylvania Holistic Scoring Guide.** The five characteristics—**focus, content, organization, style, and conventions**—have been deemed significant to any piece of writing; and, parallel to the purposes of the assessment in authentic writing, any one composition may appropriately include elements from several forms of discourse. For example, it is rare to find a piece of pure narration without some informational or expository passages. Even the best persuasive pieces incorporate some informational writing, often interspersed with imaginative and narrative disclosures. This integration occurs very naturally. Furthermore, when given a prompt that specifies the purpose for writing and the audience for whom they are to write, students should be able to demonstrate their ability to respond appropriately, regardless of the mode.

Holistic scoring, a reliable method for scoring large numbers of writing samples, is currently used to evaluate each piece of writing regardless of mode. It is based upon the readers' overall impression of the effectiveness of a piece of writing. The criteria in the Pennsylvania Writing Assessment Holistic Scoring Guide clearly define the characteristics of effective writing and make it possible to evaluate any student composition, independent of the mode chosen to execute the piece of writing. Therefore, in current training, the existing scale is applied to **all** of the writing prompts without overemphasis on mode-specific issues.

SCORING FIELD TESTS

The Scoring "Team"

Scoring thousands of field test writing samples involves a team effort. The scoring process relies on at least five different groups of people responsible for their completion:

1. The PDE's Division of Evaluation and Reports oversees the scoring process. The project director and other department staff give overall direction to the process.

2. Chief readers/trainers: These individuals help to select the standard-setting papers and assist in training the table leaders. At each scoring session, one chief reader/trainer is needed to train the scorers, monitor the overall scoring process and act as final arbitrator.

3. Assistant chief readers: These assistants help the chief reader/trainer with the anchor selection, table leader training and scorer training. At the scoring session, they assume the role and responsibilities of chief reader in their scoring room.

4. Table leaders: One table leader is needed for every seven/eight scorers. They are responsible for further training of the scorers to make certain all those at their respective tables are in agreement. They keep records of discrepant scores and are the initial arbitrator of them.

5. Scorers: These are the persons who are trained by the chief reader/trainer to score the student field test writing samples using the scoring guide and anchor papers. Each works independently under the direction of a table leader. Approximately one hundred scorers may be needed for any given year's field test. These scorers are selected from the ranks of Pennsylvania educators who respond to a notice from PDE and can obtain released time from their districts. These scorers also have the advantage of being able to return to home districts with the ability to apply major components of the assessment at the classroom and district level. Because staff development is one of the purposes of PSSA, increased training in the application of the scoring process in the classroom/district is one of the major goals. To meet this need, PDE also offers staff development sessions designed to "marry" the language of assessment to the language of instruction so educators can use the components of the assessment to influence the instruction of writing in the classroom.

The Scoring Process

One of the assessment's purposes is to provide districts with information on growth in writing within the district. In order to show growth, the same standard must be used on all papers. For this reason, sixth and ninth grade papers are currently mixed together for the scoring. The scorers do not know what grade the writing samples are from and, therefore, are not influenced by grade level. They simply apply the standard uniformly.

In preparation for the field test scoring sessions, PDE staff, chief readers/trainers, and their assistants look through about 15 percent of all papers and select the "training papers." From these, one set of six "anchor papers," exemplifying the score standards or benchmarks, is selected for each prompt. Several more training papers are selected, some of which require more judgment in balancing the criteria of one score point against another than do the anchor papers. Three sample anchor sets can be found in Appendix B. Each anchor set is written in response to the prompts found in Appendix B. Written at the top of each sample is the prompt number and the score point awarded (6–1).

Prior to the scoring sessions, PDE staff, chief readers/trainers, and assistants meet with the table leaders. During this session the whole group discusses basic procedures and finalizes training and scoring processes. At the scoring session the scorers are oriented by PDE. They are assigned to tables and are trained by the chief readers/trainers to apply the established scoring standards by using the scoring guide and training packets. After some additional training by the assistant chief readers and their table leaders, the scorers begin to score. Each paper is read and scored by two scorers. The second scorer does not know the score given by the first scorer.

In Pennsylvania, the scores for a writing sample are allowed to be adjacent; that is, a piece of writing may be given a "5" by one scorer and a "4" by another. However, if two scorers differ by more than one point (for example, a "3" and a "5"), the paper must be "arbitrated" or scored by a third scorer. Most of the time, the table leader is the third scorer and differences are quickly adjudicated. The scoring process continues until all the papers have two adjacent or two like scores.

In a large-scale assessment such as this, arbitration rates of not more than 10 percent are considered acceptable. Pennsylvania, through its extensive training and scoring process, has maintained an arbitration rate of 5 percent or less, and the last two years has had an arbitration rate under 2 percent.

SCORING THE ASSESSMENT

Assessment papers for the 1999 assessment will be scored by a contractor trained to use the Pennsylvania Writing Assessment Holistic Scoring Guide. Certain members of the WAAC select the anchor papers and training papers to be used to train the professional scorers employed by the contractor, and scorers are carefully monitored to ensure that Pennsylvania's standards are met. The same process using two scorers to read each paper is used by the contractor. The two scores are added together for a **total holistic score** ranging from 2 to 12. Reports are printed for each school with district and state data for comparison.

REPORTING ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Results of "Strategies in Writing"

The data for this element of the assessment are the number and percentage of students responding to each of the response choices for each strategy (page 6). School data is provided with comparisons for district and state. When reviewing the data, it must be remembered that this is "self reporting" by students; and, as such, it should be viewed as descriptive of, not prescriptive for, classroom practice. It cannot be assumed that there is a cause-effect relationship between these factors and performance in this writing assessment. The responses can, however, serve as the impetus for reflection on program and instruction and provide a focus for areas of improvement.

Results of the Assessment Writing Sample

Results are returned for both schools and districts, but not for individual students. Two types of data are presented from which comparisons can be drawn.

1. *Scaled Scores:* Four scaled scores are presented for each grade level. One represents the school's overall writing score with similar schools, district and state data for comparison. The other three scaled scores are by mode. These scores have only district and state data presented for comparison.

2. *Holistic Scores:* The number and percentage of writing samples awarded a total score from 2 to 12 are presented by mode and overall total by school, district and state. **The 2 to 12 scores are not grade equivalents and do not correspond to grade levels**; they are simply the sums of two scores awarded on the six-point holistic scoring scale. The numbers and percentages of non-scored papers, both non-scoreable (illegible, incoherent or blank) and off-prompt (did not respond to the prompt) also are reported.

Scores are clustered into five score categories or descriptors. Because papers from both grades 6 and 9 are scored together, descriptors that reflect more demanding standards for ninth graders have been developed for reporting purposes:

	Score Points	Score Points
Descriptors	**Grade 6**	**Grade 9**
Excellent	12, 11, 10	12, 11
Good	9, 8	10, 9
Fair	7*, 6	8, 7*
Week	5, 4	6, 5
Poor	3, 2	4, 3, 2

A paper awarded a score of 7 is considered by the PDE Writing Assessment Advisory Committee to be the minimal level of writing competence.

Generally...

- *Excellent* writing has a sharp, distinct focus demonstrating an awareness of the audience and task. There is a clarity of purpose and ideas, and a single point of view is sustained. Content is substantial, specific and/or illustrative with sophisticated ideas that are particularly well developed. The organization can be obviously controlled and/or skillfully subtle. The writer's voice is apparent in tone and originality of language. Language is precise with effective word choice and variety of sentence structures, types and lengths. Standard conventions are utilized with few mechanical and usage errors.
- Good writing is writing that has a focus; there is an awareness of audience, task, purpose, point of view and ideas. Content is specific and illustrative. Organization goes beyond the simple beginning, middle and end and has logical transitions. There is precision and variety in sentence structure and word choice. Some mechanical and usage errors may be present.
- *Fair* writing is writing that moves beyond vague focus; there is some awareness of audience, task, purpose, point of view and ideas. There is sufficient content; that is, it goes beyond repetition, listing or a mere sequence of ideas. Organization is appropriate; the piece has a beginning, middle and end. Some precision of language, sentence structure and word choice is evident; however, the writer's voice may not be apparent. Although mechanical and usage errors are evident, they are not severe enough to interfere significantly with the writer's purpose.
- *Weak* writing tends to have a confused focus; there is little awareness of audience, task, purpose or point of view. The content is superficial. Organization is confused, and there is a general lack of variety in word choice and sentence structure. Mechanical and usage errors tend to seriously interfere with the writer's purpose.
- *Poor* writing tends to have little, if any, focus. The content presented has little relevance. The organization, sentence structure, word choice and conventions are so limited that the piece is difficult, if not impossible, to understand.

All students should achieve a "minimally competent" level of writing. In all cases, "excellent" writing is the expected instructional goal, and there will be many high school students scoring above the "minimally competent" level.

PENNSYLVANIA WRITING ASSESSMENT
HOLISTIC SCORING GUIDE

6	5	4	3	2	1
• sharp, distinct focus • substantial, specific, and/or illustrative content; sophisticated ideas that are particularly well developed • obviously controlled and/or subtle organization • writer's voice apparent in tone, sentence structure, and word choice • few mechanical and usage errors	• clear focus • specific and illustrative content • logical and appropriate organization • precision and variety in sentence and word choice • some mechanical and usage errors	• adequate focus • sufficient content • appropriate organization • some precision and variety in sentence structure and word choice • mechanical and usage errors not severe enough to interfere significantly with the writer's purpose	• vague focus • content limited to a listing, repetition, or mere sequence of ideas • inconsistent organization • limited sentence variety and word choice • repeated weaknesses in mechanics and usage	• confused focus • superficial content • confused organization • lack of sentence and word choice variety • mechanical and usage errors that seriously interfere with the writer's purpose	• absence of focus • absence of relevant content • absence of organization • no apparent control over sentence structure and word choice • mechanical and usage errors so severe that writer's ideas are difficult if not impossible to understand

NON–SCOREABLE (NS)
• is illegible: i.e., includes so many undecipherable words that no sense can be made of the response or • is incoherent: i.e., words are legible but syntax is so garbled that response makes no sense or • is a blank paper

OFF-PROMPT (OP)
• is readable but did not respond to the prompt

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE WRITING

FOCUS	CONTENT	ORGANIZATION	STYLE	CONVENTIONS
• demonstrates an awareness of audience and task • establishes and maintains a clear purpose • sustains a single point of view • exhibits clarity of ideas	• information and details are specific to topic • information and details are relevant to focus • ideas are fully developed	• logical order or sequence is maintained • paragraphs deal with one subject • logical transitions are made within sentences and between paragraphs • introduction and conclusion are evident	• precise language • effective word choice • voice, tone, originality of language • variety of sentence structures, types, and lengths	• mechanics: spelling, capitalization, punctuation • usage (e.g., pronoun references, subject-verb agreement) • sentence completeness

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APPENDIX B

ANCHOR PROMPTS

Prompt 4: (Narrative/Imaginative)
Imagine that a severe storm has hit your area. Tell what happened.

As you write and rewrite your paper, remember to:

- describe what happened that day.
- give details that are specific and relevant to this experience.
- present your ideas clearly and logically.
- use words and well–constructed sentences effectively.
- correct any errors in spelling, punctuation and capitalization.

Prompt : (Informational)
Teachers are always looking for ways to help students learn better. If you could help your teachers plan classroom activities that would improve your learning, what would you suggest to them? Write to inform your teacher about your suggestions and how these activities would improve learning.

As you write and rewrite your paper, remember to:

- tell what the activities are and how they would help you learn better.
- include enough information and details so that your teacher will understand the activities and why they would help you learn better.
- present your ideas clearly and logically.
- use words and well–constructed sentences effectively.
- correct any errors in spelling, punctuation and capitalization.

Prompt 6: (Persuasive)
Local leaders are considering building a recycling plant in your community. The only available location for the plant is the community park and recreation area. Do you think the plant should be built? Write to persuade others in your community to agree with your point of view.

As you write and rewrite your paper, remember to:

- state your opinion clearly.
- support your opinion with specific details.
- present your ideas clearly and logically.
- use words and well–constructed sentences effectively.
- correct any errors in spelling, punctuation and capitalization.

The tranquility I felt as I drifted off into sleep was disturbed suddenly on that midsummer evening. What transpired after the moment my eyelids opened abruptly was powerful, strange, and frightening.

It was a warm summer evening in July. The air began to grow cooler as the hours passed and the wind became like the cries of a mother weeping for her lost son. The sounds that I heard were dark and lonesome, yet full of force and power.

My eyes opened and shut many times as sleep began to overcome my body. Just as my eyes shut for the final time, sounds of the crying wind and the falling rain disturbed me and caused me to awaken once more. I rose from the chair on which I had been resting and peered out the large bay window in the front room. The panes of glass seemed to be covered with a million tiny droplets of water, all flowing in perfect rhythm to the base of the window. Immediately, a sense of panic and fear swelled inside me. My parents had gone out for the evening and were not planning to return home for at least another hour. My heart began to beat faster with each roll of thunder I heard. The electricity in the lightning I saw frightened me and I wanted only for my mother to return home to hold me in her arms, assuring me that everything would be all right. She would tell me, "There's no reason to be afraid, honey," and I would smile and realize she was right.

She was not with me, though, and with that thought a soft tear began to roll down my cheek. I could not look outside any longer, for I knew that the storm was intensifying. The thunder was like the sound of rocks cascading down a huge pile at a stone quarry. It seemed to be roaring angry words to the lightning. Then the lightning answered the thunder without any voice at all. Electric lights beamed through the sky, lighting up the land for miles around. I heard trees blowing so harshly in the wind that they seemed to be cracking. The windows

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rattled and I could feel the house shake. The wind was now more powerful than both the thunder and lightning. It swept through my yard, picking up any loose ~~of~~ object.

Then my soft blue became ~~[illegible]~~ bitter and I cried for my mother to return. I was sweating and my breath seized gone. I couldn't bear another moment of being alone in this storm. It was then that I heard a loud banging sound. I quickly turned my head and screamed so loudly that all the people on my street could have heard me. I looked and to my relief I saw my mother walking through the back door. The sound I had heard was nothing more than the car door shutting. I burst over to my mother and wrapped my arms around her. I was crying, yet ~~[illegible]~~ her arms retracted to take my fear away. The storm started to lessen its intensity and I could once again hear cars passing on the pavement outside. The fright I had felt inside began to leave me, and I sat with my mother in the same chair that I had almost fallen asleep in. I sat on the arm of the chair and she put her arm around my shoulder. The storm was now a beautiful thing, not a frightening one.

This piece is clearly focused and controlled from opening statement through conclusion. The writer has a strong sense of audience and task and maintains a single point of view throughout the piece, pulling together the powerful, strange and frightening aspects of the storm. Ideas are sophisticated and well-developed with detail and imagery. Organization has the writer's emotions flow with the storm. Strong voice. Open, unembarrassed tone. Interesting similes and excellent word choice. Writer conveys expertise in language, mechanics and usage.

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PROMPT 4 – SCORE POINT 5

Severe storms don't hit my area often, but when they do, it is wise to be prepared. I'd like to take you back in time to the Blizzard of '93. Expecting snow, everyone gathered in the supermarket to purchase those last minute necessities. Little did the people of Name of town know that what was in store for them was more than a light dusting of snow for the holidays.

I awoke one peaceful December morning to hear my mom softly humming a Christmas tune. The delicious aroma from the kitchen lured me to where she was baking as I appeared in the doorway, a warm smile formed on her face. "Look, Katie, it's snowing! I'm finally going to get the White Christmas that I've been dreaming of."

Along with my mother's joyous humming, the snow continued on through the rest of the day. It also continued to fall through the following day, and even the one after that. It seemed as though it would never cease. The neighborhood children all gathered in the field to have snowball fights and to go sledding. The snow continued falling all the while all of the mothers baked cookies to prepare for the upcoming holiday. The snow piled higher, and still higher. Soon it was too dangerous to leave the confines of your home. Roads were treacherously impassable, and there was wonderment if whether traveling to visit relatives in Christmas would be possible. We began to wonder if we would ever see the green grass again. Luckily, the roads were eventually cleared, and everyone returned to their normal lifestyle. It seemed like an eternity, however, until all of the snow had vanished. Now whenever the people of Name of town hear the

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with snow,.. they are fully prepared

Narrative has a clear, distinct focus, stated in the first paragraph and maintained throughout. The content is specific, detailed and illustrative with a nice contrast of the storm outside and the relative calm of the kitchen inside. A logical order of events allows the reader to move easily through the text though some weakness in paragraphing is evident in the third paragraph, which contains many different ideas. Voice is heard by word choice, use of dialogue and choice of details. Sentence variety is employed well to control meaning; however, some awkwardness exists ("there was wonderment if whether traveling to visit relatives on Christmas would be possible."). There are minimal mistakes in the use of conventions.

Oh no! I was just watching the news channel, and the weather man said that a severe snowstorm has been located on the forcast! It's heading our way. We're supposed to get 6ft. in the next 3 days! Imagine that, 6ft of snow! It sounds like fun, but 6 ft is just too much snow. I won't be able to get outside! Nether will my brother, considering he is only about 3½ ft. tall. I geuss I'll just pray that we don't have toomuch snow!

Okay, so we only have 2ft. so far, maybe it won't get worse. I mean, 2ft. is enough for my family!

Dad just got out the snowblower and is doing the driveway! My big sister is shoveling the sidewalk, and Kalo, (The Butler) is making everyone hot cocoa. My little brother and I are helping mom bake cookies! This is a wacko day!

AAAAHHHH!!!!! The snow is <u>really</u> building up today! It is about 6ft. high, and Dad can't get the snowblower out! Mom called the snowplows but they were all snowed in! Luckily Kalo had got us enough grocierys.

There is a part in the attic that is about to break because of the heavy snow on top of it! I sure hope it doesn't!

My brother is terribly ~~so~~ worried and is crying! My sister is saying we are all going to die! I'm just watching. Mom and Dad help Kalo make a fire and get blankets. I hope it doesn't snow much longer!

My brother is really sick. He might not make it if it keeps on snowing! We tried calling a doctor, but the lines were dead! I hope he gets better. I'll be praying my hardest tonight!

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Kalo got better, and the storm has calmed down. All the trees and bushes are gone though! I don't hear the birds and the deer don't come to our window anymore. I miss the old world!

By:

The purpose of describing a severe storm is maintained throughout; however, the writer introduces so many fringe topics that purpose almost becomes muddled. There are many specific details, but none are developed. Each sentence piles on one more. Piece has a good introduction and relies on chronological order to provide connections. The conclusion, however, does not follow logically. The piece jumps from a sense of panic about the snow to domestic tranquillity while helping Mom bake cookies to concern for sick brother. There is some variety of sentence structure and use of jargon reflects the writer's voice (a wacko day, AAHHH!!!). Mechanical errors are not severe enough to interfere with the reader's understanding.

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The Tornado of 1986

(The Bad one to).

Well on afternoon there was this tornado storm we had I was just about 4 yrs old when this happened. And everyone said they saw it going down the Name of highway highway. And everyone was so scared didn't know what to do. And the hail was as big as golf balls and the tornado tore off the roof across the street where I use to live and then someone called the fire department and they were down there for a long while trying to fix it and that was a bad experience for me because I was so scared because I didn't knew what to do. My dad was just going to close the window when he was trying to not get scared and he saw the roof across the street and he said to us he saw the roof 100 off

And it damaged alot of stuff and the town was a disaster area and alot of peeps were killed, we never had one like that again because thank god we ever-never had one like that again. And I must say that the tornado never happened ever again And I was very scared that happened because I was just around 4 years old

And It was the last one we ever had since 1986;

The End

Focus is vague. The writer remains on the title "The Tornado of 1986" but makes no clear, consistent point about it. The piece has the quality of an "everything-there-is-to-tell" summary. The content is limited to a list of facts connected by "and." Ideas are stated but not developed or explained . . .each is limited to its own clause ("And the hail was as big as golf balls and the tornado tore off the roof across the street where I use to live and then someone called the fire department and they were down there for a long while trying to fix it and . . . "). There is a sense of an introduction and conclusion (And it was the last one we ever had since 1986. The End."). Paragraphing has only rough logic to it. Transitions are limited to "and." There is no apparent control or conscious choice of sentence structure or vocabulary. The weaknesses in mechanics, usage, and sentence structure necessitate re-reading for understanding.

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PROMPT 4 – SCORE POINT 2

It was a sunny summer day. All of the neighborhood and I were out playing base ball. Then all of then sudden Shane hit a ball that would of being a home run but the wind pick up and blew the ball back. 2.

It started to get real dark. We all look up and the sky was dark black. Then it started to thunder and lighting, So we went inside for about a hour and half till it was over.

Focus is split between the ball game and the storm. The writer develops the story of the ball game more than the storm. What is implied as the focus of the story is alluded to in the sentence, "So we went inside for about a hour and half till it was over." The body and conclusion are both included in paragraph two. Transitions are limited to "then" and "so." Not a lot of imagination in word choice and/or sentence variety. The mechanical errors are serious enough to interfere with the flow, and the lack of completeness interferes with the reader's ability to understand.

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PROMPT 4 – SCORE POINT 1

Well The storm hit and it was windy and it was Raining and houses Are Being Damaged and people are Dieing. It was a Disaster It was a mess.

There seems to be an awareness of topic but no apparent sense of audience or purpose. Content remains superficial, stating only that there was a storm and it did damage. There is a brief list of ideas connected with "and," but there is an absence of any detail or other development. There's a sense of an introduction, body and conclusion, but there's no order beyond beginning, middle and end. Transitions are accomplished only through "and." Writer displays no apparent control of sentence structure or word choice for meaning. A flat tone is established through "it was" repetition. Many errors exist in conventions, ranging from punctuation, capitalization, spelling, run-on sentence, tense change.

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Teaching is obviously an extremely demanding job. Rarely am I able to come across an imaginative teacher who brings new, fresh, and creative instructive activities to the classroom. As each school year progresses the work assigned to me grows more tedious and boring. I could definitely lend my teachers a few good suggestions which would help keep learning fun.

Group work is an example of a way students could become interested in their studies. I am personally not an advocate of out-of-school group meetings, which cause scheduling problems and arguments between workers. Supervision by the teacher who assigned the group project is needed to prevent confusion and provide control and organization. Therefore, group work should mainly be done <u>in the classroom</u>. This way, students could interact and encourage one another by sharing a work load and explaining new research topics to their peers. Sometimes it is necessary and entertaining for kids just to work in a small study group without adult instruction. When a teacher never allows this, learning seems monotonous and dull because the class is always forced to listen to the same person speak.

Students, no matter what their age is, are often easily amused by childlike activities. Instructors should take time in class to view films and sing songs. I'm totally serious when I say that hearing a catchy tune which goes along with a new vocabulary definition helps plant the word permanently into memory. Singing grabs the students' attention and is a fun idea that involves more kids in class. Chances are that teachers will wake up even the laziest students and even hear them chanting the jingles down the hall. As for the movies viewed in class, allow kids to bring in popcorn if they wish. They'll be less fidgety and more attentive if they have something to munch on. Also, it is helpful either to inform students of the story they will be watching or have them read the book as a

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class before the film is shown. They will be aware of what goes on during the story and view the film more closely, looking for key occurrences.

Lastly, trips outside in nice weather could be helpful. Students enjoy a sunny atmosphere and can read, write, or have discussions while sitting comfortably in the grass. A change of surroundings is important every once in a while. These outdoor visits would keep the students from getting bored.

I would be surprised and appreciative if some of my ideas were ever considered by school faculty members. Sadly, it is rare that teachers use their students' suggestions to improve situations in the classroom, especially in high school. Teachers don't yet seem to realize that some kids know better than they do when it comes to effective and enjoyable learning.

The writer has a very defined concept of audience and task and exhibits a sharp focus from the introduction ("I could definitely lend my teachers a few good suggestions.") through the well-developed suggestions to the rather disgruntled conclusion. The cause/effect relationship is evident. The ideas are varied and well developed. The writer presents four main ideas (group work, songs, films, trips outside) with substantial development. The introduction is engaging. It's obvious that the writer planned the ideas/suggestions, but their order seems random. Transitions are made through the repetition of the idea of "fun" and through specific transitional words ("Lastly"). Writer exhibits a strong voice with original approaches to suggestions. This piece has effective and dramatic word choice (appreciative, key occurrences, attentive) and a good control of sentence structure to give variety and effect. There are few mechanical errors.

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If I could help my teachers plan lessons and activities I think that would be neat. I could give them many suggestions.

One suggestion I would give to my math teacher ~~would~~ is that she needs to have her students do more group activities. I would suggest that because students need to learn how to cooperate and do things together. I would also suggest ~~doin~~ doing more projects. We have only done one project throughout the whole year so far. I would suggest that because if we just do work all the time the students would feel smothered with work. If we do projects then the students will lighten up a bit.

A suggestion I would give to my science teacher is to do different things. After each lesson we'll do the same things continuously. She should have us do different activities, rather than having us ~~do~~ ~~the~~ doing the same things over and over again.

I think that my homeroom teacher should have us do more things orally. Instead of just doing worksheets she should try to plan a lesson for the class to do orally. The reason I would suggest that is because I think students would learn more that way. Also, ~~stude~~ students could learn from one anothers mistakes.

I cannot think of any suggestions to give to my social studies and reading teachers. I think they do their

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lessons very well.
These are my suggestions to my teachers. I think that if some of them would do those things students would learn more and better things than they are now.

The writer demonstrates a clear focus by stating it in the first and last paragraphs and maintaining it between. Though the ideas are related to specific teachers, the ideas themselves are general. Suggestions are followed by an explanation or rationale. This piece is organized and sequential. Each paragraph deals with a particular suggestion for a particular teacher. Though the word choice gets the job done, the writer does not demonstrate strong voice or originality. There is some attempt at sentence variety. Few mechanical and usage errors in this piece.

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PROMPT 5 – SCORE POINT 4

I think a lot of teachers lose their students to much. They usually just tell us the facts and not let us understand what they are teaching. If you make it fun or intresting then the class will lern better. For example, one day my reading teacher wasn't there so we had a substitute. At that time we were reading Where the Red Fern Grows. The way our regular teacher would read it was so everyone would have a turn reading. This way was all right but boring. The way the sub did it was he gave the parts of the charactors to people. So when someone was reading the would be in the front of the classroom miming it out.

There was a nother time when I was in fourth grade in spelling. It was a day before a spelling test and we had some hard words. Our teacher said our desks needed to be cleaned and we had to study for the test. So he put shaving cream on everyone's desk and said each time he said a word we should spell it out on our desks. Then when we were done sighting it someone would say how to spell it. Then the people who got it wrong would write that word a couple times.

A nother time was with my fourth grade teacher was teaching symetricle shapes. To show an example of a square being symetricle he took out a piece of the carpet. He showed us where it was symetricle. Something that gets the classs attention is good. Like when your are going over homework the teacher could throw a ball to a person then that person tells the answer. That is what teachers should do than how we. Then we might lern a little better.

The writer is consistently aware of the task ("If you make it fun or interesting then the class will lern better."). Content is the best feature of this paper. The writer tries to specifically illustrate each idea offered. There is an introduction, but the conclusion gets mixed in with the body of the paper. Paragraphing is good, but some paragraphs contain too many ideas. There is some attempt to vary sentence structure. Word choice is functional but not sufficiently original to create a clear writer's voice. Some problems exist with spelling and punctuation.

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PROMPT 5 – SCORE POINT 3

Dear Mr. Teacher's name

After receiving quite a few bad grades this term, I wondered what I could do to help bring them up. But after some intense thinking I came up with nothing. Then I thought that maybe the teacher could help out to improve my learning.

I think the most important thing to helping us learn is to keep the subject interesting. I often find myself wondering off into some other world and missing a lot of the material. I think you could make class more interesting by having review and study games and somehow getting everybody to participate. I also think you should have less individual work.

Your student,
[redacted]

The writer demonstrates his/her awareness of audience and task by use of letter format. Writer then proceeds to give a sequence of ideas with little supporting detail and no development of the ideas. There's a good introduction but no conclusion other than a signature. Voice is evident in the first paragraph and the "wondering off" sentence in the second paragraph, but there is little precise or original language. There are no significant mechanical errors.

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PROMPT 5 – SCORE POINT 2

Teachers are always trying to help students come to school and do work and help each. Other like one of your. Friends if they need help ask the teacher if you can help that student., if the teachers said if we got a activities and everybody would like to do it cause activities can help you out alot. well it can help me learn if I know what they. talking about and how they going to say it and if somebody needs help to raise there hand and the teachers would go to you if you don't understand about learning better I do good in. school I like to help people out ~~of~~ if they didn't understand whats going on and I told them But if they Didn't understand I just tell them to Ask the teachers. about activites teachers cam help me out is I need help in MATh a litttk Bit and the other subject I know them But not alot I like when the teachers talk alot about the activites how you do it how you feel about it if you learned alot about the subject. I learned I think how am going to Be when I grow up hows it going to be. I think I want to Be a police woman I like to learned about that. cause thats a activities help people. get out of the street take them to Jail and when they come out they would know Better. about coming to school if you want to work you got to come to school So they can show you how to write and they can show you how to speek and learn about what they

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doing cause if you don't come to school how you going to get a job come to school listed to the teachers. want they say.

The writer seems unaware of the assigned task and audience. Writer rambles with a confused focus. The content deals with what the writer likes about school instead of what can help him/her learn. Writer really only has two ideas, and he/she repeats them over and over. Most of the information is not relevant to the focus. The organization is confused as the writer jumps from idea to idea (talking about activities to what he/she wants to be when he/she grows up.). Writer shows no concept of paragraph. Piece sounds like a stream of consciousness. There is little evidence of correct sentence structure or how to make thoughts link together cohesively. Writer also exhibits a limited word choice. A lack of correct usage, evidence of run-on sentences and fragments, and other conventional errors make the paper difficult to understand.

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PROMPT 5 – SCORE POINT 1

If I could begin this school year all over again I would try harder, be nicer, and not fight as much.

At first glance, this paper may appear to be off prompt; however, the writer does address "school" so he/she is given the benefit of the doubt, and the paper is scored. The lack of content makes it difficult to really judge any of the areas adequately. There appears to be no awareness of audience, and purpose is difficult to determine, also. This piece consists of one sentence that is a list of things the student would do if he/she could begin the school year over rather than ways to improve learning. Organization is impossible to judge, as is sentence structure, since only one sentence was written. This paper is a good example of a lack of the characteristics of effective writing.

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Have you ever been to a landfill? If you have, you know that they are ugly, demeaning scars on the surface of our beautiful planet. Pungent odors constantly eminate from them, and strays chemicals always seem to end up in our water.

The only feasable plan that we are aware of to cut down on landfill use is to recycle anything that we possibly can. Only after we do this, can we look for the ultimate solution. Recycling will buy us a great deal of time.

I understand that the facility to carry out the valuable process of recycling will replace our recreation area. What good will it be in a decade anyway? The water in the lake will be cloudy and polluted from the use of a new landfill that will be necessary for us to build. The meager destruction of our park is only a slight inconvenience when considering the potential that the plant will bring.

In fact, it might not even eliminate our community park; it might only be a temporary closing for relocation and repair. If the recycling plant is as successful as expected, the landfill's burden will ease a considerable amount. In that case, the plans for another landfill could be altered. Much of the money and land could be used to create a new community getaways. We would have enough money to make significant improvements to the quality of our current parks. Even a man-made lake filled with clean, sparkling water is not beyond reality. The possibilities and benefits of this joint plan are limitless.

I ask you to realize the magic that this projection holds. It has no major downfalls haunting the area between the lines. Any of the slightest difficulties are tremendously outweighed by this attainable vision of the future. It is your choice, an overabundance of horrendous landfill space and

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one sorry-looking, polluted park, or a reduction in landfill space, a curve in air and water pollution, and a beautiful, clean park where people, as well as animals, of the community would be happy to go.

The solution to our problem is perfectly clear, so unless your family is keen on swimming in antifreeze, and you like seeing poor, defenseless animals die because of our recycled trash, you know what this town needs as well as I do. We have already experienced the consequences that are suffered as a result of our hesitation to care for our own planet. Please do not allow us to continue making the same mistakes.

This paper has a strong, clear, distinct focus from the beginning to the end. The writer demonstrates a clear sense of his/her audience and purpose. The ideas are well developed with supporting details. The idea of a recycling plant and its advantages are well supported as "the valuable process of recycling." The order is inherently logical as it follows the development of arguments. The writer displays an obvious control of sentence structure and interesting and vivid word choices ("The meager destruction of one park is only a slight inconvenience when . . .," "ugly," "demeans," "scars on the surface of our beautiful planet," "pungent," "emanate," "magic that this project holds"). This writer has a strong understanding and control of language and conventions. Some errors exist, but they are not so glaring that they're necessarily detected on a first reading.

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If builders would want to build a recycling plant, in our community, that would be great. But, considering the fact that it will be built on the community park, then no. Even though a recycling plant is a great idea, and we really could use it, they are building it on our community park. Our community park is used all the time. Our kids play in the park, adults love the park and use it to relax. People jog and run in the park, also. If the park was torn down, where would we go? What would our kids do for fun? The answer to this question is not good. Our kids would spend there time roaming the streets and getting into trouble. They would vandilize things for fun. We already have kids roaming the streets and vandilizing things. This would just add onto our problem. They might even start getting involved in drugs. And what about the adults? where would they go when they have a tired and worn out day? They really would like to get away from life's daily problems; They would like to come to the park and relax. what about all those runners and joggers? where would they run now that there isn't a park? If our park wasn't there, they would have to run out in the streets or sidewalks. Then they have the chance of getting hit by cars. And they couldn't be able to get there good workouts.

I feel that a recycling center shouldn't be built, and I hope you feel that way also. There are many solutions, in

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which we could solve this problem, For example, maybe we still can build the recycling center, right along the outskirts of our community. We could collect our recycling goods ourselves, within our home, and a truck could come pick it up, once a week, and take it to the plant. Or, maybe a truck from another community plant, could come pick our goods up.

I feel that our community really needs the park. It satisfies everyones leisure needs. If we do one of these solutions, then we are getting one good thing and still keeping another.

The focus of this paper is clear, and the purpose is obvious and maintained throughout. The writer provides explanations of reasons, though they are somewhat general in nature. Although the writer doesn't paragraph correctly, the information is written in a logical order. The paper has a definite beginning, middle and end. Voice is heard through the variety in sentence structure, type and length. Language is effective for the purpose, but it could be more precise to enhance voice. There are some mechanical and usage errors, but they don't interfere with the meaning.

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PROMPT 6 – SCORE POINT 4

People of the community, we are all gathered together today to discuss a very important topic concerning all of us. It's weather or not we should build a recycling plant in place of our park and recreation area.

I believe that we should build the recycling plant, the reason being, that we all have one life to live. Meaning, if we have the recycling plant we can cut down on pollution and it would be alot better on the O-zone layer. See, without the O-zone layer we wouldn't live nearly as long as we plan too. It protects us from the sun's harmful rays and terrible heat. Without it would mean, we could all die due to skin cancer; dehidration or even, severe sunburn. The recycling plant would be more helpful than a recreation park. Can a recreation area or park make a plastic bottle into a safety airbag for a car or save a few trees by recycling paper? I don't think so.

That's why we should stick together and vote on having the recycling plant built. So you decide people you can spend your life in an extremly hot, toxic, and risk taking area; or you could always recycle and save the area you love and yourself.

This piece exhibits an adequate focus, though the writer does detour into some detail about the ozone layer. The ozone layer discussion is intended to support the writer's content about the need for a recycling plant, but the connection is somewhat weak. This paper has a definite beginning, middle and end. The writer's voice is present, though its informality leads to some trite expressions. There are some errors in spelling, mechanics and usage.

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I think it would be good building a recycling plant in our community it will help everyone because of trash in the streets, if everyone gets together & picks up cans, bottles, and plastick objects it will help the workers pick them up. Recycling is helping the streets the Parks & rivers from getting them more dirty. I its ok to build up the Recycling Plant because our community will have safer streets, parks & cleaner rivers. We don't need trash ~~all~~ while having something to do with it!

Thank you!

The focus is vague. Is the writer talking about a recycling plant or pollution? The content is limited to a list of ideas that are not developed ("trash in the streets," "help the workers," "helping the streets, the parks and rivers," "safer streets"). The organization is random with no logical transitions. There is very little control of sentence variety. The writer shows some difficulty with spelling, capitalization and some punctuation.

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Recycling Plant

I think that we should'nt have a recycling plant in our town because it would take up the park and recreation area space. I mean we could always take and export the trash to other plants. Also we don't have to build it right in town, we could build it right out side of town. So weather you like to recycle or do not recycle that is my opinion

The writer moves in and out of focus with almost every sentence. The content is superficial. The writer states ideas briefly and without explanation. The introduction could be interpreted as "I think . . ." and the conclusion as " . . . that is my opinion;" however, both are weak. There is no apparent sense of control of sentence structure or word choice for effectiveness. This paper contains several usage, mechanics and spelling errors.

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No recycling shode not be bicled it will tack up Space. Time and mehey. wen it might polanfeath more

The writer's focus is present ("No recycling shode not be biel d"), and the writer then lists three reason why it should not be built ("It will tack up space. Time and mehey (money)"). Other than these ideas, plus the idea that " . . . it might polont eath (pollute the earth) more," this paper has nothing else. None of the idea s are developed or explained. There is no organization, no apparent control over sentence structure and word choice, and the mechanical and usage errors are so severe that the writer's ideas are difficult to understand.

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APPENDIX C

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APPENDIX D

Testing Accommodations to Encourage Participation by Students with Disabilities in the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment

Testing Accommodations to Encourage Participation by Students with Disabilities in the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment

Introduction

According to the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) Coordinator's Handbook, "**ALL students enrolled in the public schools ... are to be included in the assessment process.**" The purpose of this document is to help Pennsylvania educators to obtain the participation of ALL students in the PSSA tests, specifically students with disabilities. Accommodations that will allow students with disabilities to participate in the testing are listed and, where necessary, briefly described.

Why include all students?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 (IDEA 97) and the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) mandate that students with disabilities are to be included in state and district wide assessments.

In Chapter 4 academic standards and assessment regulations, the PA State Board of Education established as State policy that "Public education prepares students for adult life by attending to their intellectual and developmental needs and challenging them to achieve at their highest level possible. In conjunction with families and other community institutions, public education prepares students to become self-directed, life-long learners and responsible, involved citizens." 22 Pa. Code §4.11(b).

Chapter 14 special education regulations and the Chapter 15 regulations pertaining to protected handicapped students also support this perspective. Chapter 14 addresses the issue of student participation through the student's Individualized Education Program, the IEP. The Chapter 14 regulations state that the IEP of a student is to contain "A description of the extent to which the eligible student will participate in programs and activities with noneligible students and of the adaptations, if any, to activities which are necessary to ensure the student's meaningful participation." 22 Pa. Code §14.31(f)(6).

Chapter 15 students have their needs addressed in service agreements developed by the student's parents and an appropriate school administrator. Chapter 15 states, "the law and its regulations require

public educational agencies to ensure that these students have equal opportunity to participate in the school program and extracurricular activities to the maximum extent appropriate to the ability of the protected handicapped student in question. School districts are required to provide these students with the aids, services and accommodations that are designed to meet the educational needs of protected handicapped students as adequately as the needs of nonhandicapped students are met." 22 Pa. Code §15.1(b).

How should participation and accommodation decisions be made?

The IEP team, which includes the student's parent(s), must address the student's instructional and assessment needs. The team must decide whether the student will take the assessment and what, if any, accommodations are needed to ensure the student's meaningful participation in the PSSA. This information must be documented on the student's IEP.

Most students with IEPs will participate in the PSSA, but a small number of those students may need an alternate assessment. The IEP team must base participation decisions on:

- the student's strengths;
- the student's instructional goals; and
- the student's learning characteristics.

Participation decisions may not be based upon the student's disability label or class placement. If the student is working toward different instructional goals than those found in the general curriculum, the IEP team may decide that the student needs an alternate assessment.

Criteria for making accommodation decisions include:

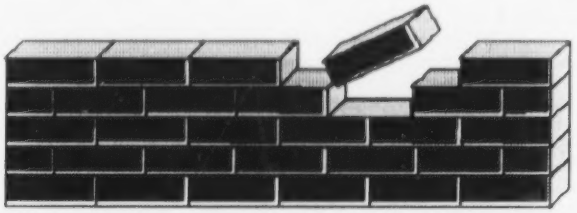
1. the accommodation should not provide the student with an unfair advantage;
2. the testing contractor must be able to score the test; and
3. test security must not be violated.

What are accommodations?

The words "accommodation," "adaptation" and "modification" are often used synonymously. For the purpose of this document, an accommodation is defined as anything that is changed so as to become suitable or anything that meets a need. Ideally, the testing situation would simply be an extension of the instructional setting. Those accommodations used in the instructional process should be used, if appropriate, when assessing a student. The intent of providing an accommodation is to ensure that a student with a disability is not put at a disadvantage in the testing situation.

Are all accommodations that are used during instruction allowed for assessment?

When testing, the accommodations used must not give students with special needs an advantage over other students. Accommodations are meant to make the assessment fair for all students. In addition, the accommodation must not change what is being tested. For example, it would not be appropriate to read a reading test to a student if the test is measuring how well a student reads. On the other hand, if the test is measuring whether or not the student can draw meaning from text, this may be appropriate. The impact of the accommodations on the skills being assessed should be determined separately for each test, since the accommodations used depend on the type of test and the purpose for using it.



Removing the barriers

Below is a list of some accommodations (this is not an exhaustive list) which may be used to assist a **student with disabilities** to participate in the statewide assessment.

Presentation

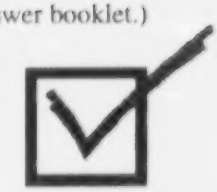
- Use sign language or the student's native language to give directions.
- Quietly repeat directions to individual students.
- Have student demonstrate understanding of directions.
- Accompany oral directions with written directions.
- Cue the student to remain on task.
- Read test items (for math or writing prompts only).
- Check periodically to make sure student is marking in correct spaces.
- Provide physical assistance.

Response *(in all cases, answers must be transferred into the regular answer booklet)*

- Allow student to mark responses in a test booklet rather than on an answer sheet.
- Allow student to point to response.
- Allow student to answer questions orally.
- Allow student to respond on audiotape for math and reading tests.

Test Modifications

- Obtain and use Braille tests or large-print versions.
- Use enlarged answer sheets. (Answers must be transcribed into regular answer booklet.)
- Provide written steps for directions.
- Highlight key words or phrases in directions.
- Mask portions of test to direct child's attention to specific areas.
- Utilize different position of paper or alter student's test-taking position.
- Use colored stickers for visual cues.
- Use acetate color shield on pages to reduce glare and increase contrast.



Setting

- Allow student to use adaptive or special furniture (e.g., a study carrel).
- Test in a separate room or in small groups to reduce distractions.
- Reduce stimuli (e.g., limit number of items on desk).
- Provide appropriate lighting.
- Use preferential seating.
- Secure papers to work area with tape or magnets.

Timing/Scheduling

- Increase or decrease the opportunity for movement.
- Permit additional breaks for students during testing.
- Increase test time.
- Provide flexible scheduling.

Assistive Devices (any assistive technology currently being used to access the curriculum)

- Allow augmentative communication systems or strategies, including letter boards, picture communication systems and voice output systems.
- Use FM or other type of assistive listening device.
- Provide a magnifier, large-print or Braille materials.
- Allow alternate writing systems including portable writing devices and computers.
- Use mounting systems including slantboards and easels.
- Allow counting devices such as a calculator (EXCEPT for the non-calculator section of the mathematics assessment).

Other options

- Use chubby or thin pencils depending upon the student's needs.
- Use long, well-sharpened pencils.

Can a student be excluded?

1. While the goal is participation of all students, current Assessment Regulations of the State Board of Education state that any student may be excused from the PSSA by parental request. If, after reviewing the assessment materials, parents find that the state assessments are in conflict with their religious beliefs, they may submit a written request to the appropriate school district personnel asking to excuse their child from the assessments. (It should be noted that when Chapter 4 becomes effective, this exclusion will become more restrictive for future assessments.)

2. While most students with IEPs will participate, students with IEPs may be excused from the assessment when requested by the IEP team for such reasons as emotional stress caused by the assessment process or lack of environmental awareness on the part of the student. It is generally agreed that students receiving Life Skills Support or whose IEPs are referenced in life skills curricular areas may not have had sufficient opportunity to learn what is being assessed; thus, this assessment would be inappropriate for them, although there may be exceptions.

3. Students with Service Plans under Chapter 15 may be excused for reasons similar to those stated above by their planning team.

4. A student may be excused from testing because of limited English proficiency, extended absence, withdrawal from school, etc.

If you feel one of these reasons is appropriate for one of your students, you should contact your school/district test coordinator.

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